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FAITH AS A FACTOR IN THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE AMERIND

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INTRODUCTION

No effort is made in this paper to discuss technical words and phrases, for if one first defines his use of such, and is consistent in application, no misunderstanding should occur.

By the term *economic man* is here meant the man who for future gain produces or traffics in desirable goods; such a man is gradually evolved from the natural man who produces or traffics simply to supply immediate wants. The term *production* here means the effort put forth by man to make or to possess some desired goods which before did not exist in the form or quantity in which they appear when finally produced (as implements, utensils, clothing, shelter, products of agriculture, of zoöculture, etc.); and it is also used to mean the effort put forth to obtain goods which before were the property of no one (as game, fish, natural vegetal foods, etc.). By *distribution* is here meant the division of the goods previously produced among the various members of the producing group (as the hunting-party, family, clan or gens, tribe, etc.). As here employed the term *consumption* means the act of final utilization performed upon the produced goods (as the eating of foods, the use of materials for clothing, shelter, etc., and the destruction or abandonment of property at funerals, feasts, etc.).

Economists have scanned and brushed aside the various cost-of-production theories, the demand-and-supply theories, and the utility theories until the foremost theorists seem now to hover over and to nestle as their own and as the final theory, the marginal-utility theory of value. Although marginal utility may

prove to be the final theory of value, yet back in the formative days—where few theorists have searched—there were numerous mythic influences, some of which assisted while others hindered the present-day accepted economic laws. These forces are beliefs; they are parts of the philosophy of primitive man. Some of these beliefs are found in his cosmology, others in his theology, others in his religion, and still others in his social and political philosophy.

Such beliefs occur constantly in Amerindian mythology, and, from the point of view of economics, they defy scientific or logical classification, or rational explanation. Yet there they are, real, potent forces affecting the economic life of the primitive American; and because they are facts they must be taken into consideration.

SOME BELIEFS AFFECTING PRODUCTION

For reasons perfectly understood, agriculture depends in its beginnings largely on the efforts of women, and so in fact do most of the efforts of primitive people excepting those of hunting, fishing, and the manufacture of man's implements. Yet no race has become an economic one (a vast aggregate made up of the individual economic man) while it depended on the productive efforts of its women. There is always the imperative necessity of maternity, and the duties of motherhood and wifehood preclude very general and sustained extra-family productive labors. And since there are no unmarried women in primitive society, there is no productive female class outside of the family.

The social philosophy of the Amerind draws a line between the labors of man and woman which cannot be mistaken. From his social viewpoint no greater indignity can be offered a man than to be reduced by his fellow tribesmen to the rank of a woman. He would prefer death at the hands of his tribesmen to the loss of his voice in the councils and his standing as a warrior or hunter, for those are rights and duties of manhood. It is

readily seen that a tremendous change, both intertribal and extra-tribal, must slowly have taken place before such a body of people could become an economic tribe depending on the sustained and continuous productive labors of its men.

Gen. Ely S. Parker, an educated Iroquois, says of the Six Nations: "Among all the Indian tribes, especially the more powerful ones, the principle that a man should not demean himself or mar his dignity by cultivating the soil or gathering its product was most strongly inculcated and enforced. It was taught that a man's province was war, hunting, and fishing. While the pursuit of agriculture, in any of its branches, was by no means prohibited, yet, when any man, excepting the cripples, old men, and those disabled in war or hunting, chose to till the earth, he was at once ostracized from men's society, classed as a woman or squaw, and was disqualified from sitting or speaking in the councils of his people until he had redeemed himself by becoming a skilful warrior or a successful hunter."¹ In the first quarter of the seventeenth century it was written of the Canadian tribes north of St Lawrence river: "In fact, they would make fun of a man who, except in some great necessity, would do anything that should be done by a woman." They said of a missionary who was carrying wood, "He's really a woman."² The same sentiment could be repeated almost indefinitely from the various Amerind tribes.

It is not claimed that large fields of maize were not cultivated by the Amerind, for facts prove the contrary.³ After a careful study of these people as agriculturists, Mr Carr says, in substance, that they raised maize in large quantities; and while, as a matter of fact, the women, children, and old men always cultivated the fields, yet the warriors cleared the ground, and, when not engaged in war or hunting, aided in cultivating and harvesting the crops.

¹ Carr, *Mounds of the Mississippi Valley*, pp. 17-18.

² Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, vol. v, p. 133.

³ Harshberger, *Maize, Penn. Univ. Studies*; also Carr, op. cit.

The amount of such assistance varied, being greater among the tribes south of Ohio river and less among the Iroquois tribes.¹

While it is found that social belief fixing division of labor between sexes was disintegrating among the eastern agricultural tribes, and men (when no manly pursuits were at hand) often assisted the women, yet the primitive social division of labor was much more strictly adhered to among the non-agricultural tribes of America. However, throughout the continent such belief was a barrier to any expanding existence due to a growing economic life.

The Menomini tribe in Wisconsin has a belief which has kept it from sowing fields of the nutritious, productive cereal *ma-no'-min*, or wild rice (*Zizania aquatica L.*). One of their religious myths, treating of the origin of the tribe, explains how they first obtained this cereal, which is so important a staple with them that the tribal name is derived from it. While the young tribe lived on Menominee river, the boundary between the upper peninsula of Michigan and Wisconsin, Mä'näbësh, a half-man, half-god mythic creation of the tribe, gave to them the extensive fields of wild rice along Menominee river and told them that they should always have the grain. The tribe has moved twice during historic time — first to the vicinity of Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin, and then to their present reservation north of that lake. They claim never to have sown the grain, because, they say, if Mä'näbësh wanted them to have it, he would provide it. In the year 1852, when about to take residence on their present reservation, the agent held repeated councils with the Menomini for the purpose of inducing them to gather the grain to be resown in their new home; but his efforts were futile, and the tribe points with pride today to the large fields of the plant now growing in their vicinity which Mä'näbësh has provided them since they took reservation.

According to Niópet, chief of the tribe, it was about ten years after the Menomini removed to their present reservation before

¹ Carr, op. cit., p. 35.

Lake Shawano (where the annual crop has since been gathered) produced the grain in sufficient quantities to be harvested. Yet during those years they claim not to have sown a single kernel. Of recent years the land around the lake has been owned by whites who quite generally refuse the tribe access to the shore, so that their harvest is often a failure; nevertheless, they steadfastly refuse to sow the seed in any of the many suitable and available places. The restricting influence of this belief is more noticeable when it is known that the Ojibwa of Wisconsin (brothers of the Menomini) sow wild rice. They also claim that all of the wild-rice beds in the state which they now harvest were originally sown by their tribesmen from seeds obtained as far west as the Red River of the North.

The tutelar god, the "my god" of the family, clan, and tribe, is often a plant or animal concerning which there is some religious belief which forbids the particular human group (especially the clan which calls its tutelar god its "totem") from killing or possessing the animal or plant. And strange as this may seem, the belief is operative in districts where the thing tabooed is often not only a food, but frequently a staple which furnishes shelter and clothing as well to the clans of the same tribe.

Among the reasons for such beliefs are these: Certain animals (as the grizzly bear) are the abiding-places of men's spirits;¹ certain animals (as the owls) are the ghosts of men;² and certain animals, like the bear and the bison, had common bear and bison ancestors with the clan or tribe. This is the reason that the Menomini today "begs the pardon" of the bear which he has killed, calling it "elder brother," and telling the bear either that the killing was accidental or else that he must forgive him this one offense for his poor family is starving.

"The Crow Indians will neither trap nor hunt a bear. They believe it is bad luck to kill a bear, and will not touch the food. . . . The Crows say the bear has a spirit in him, and to kill it offends

¹ Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 1892, p. 90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 275.

the great Wa-con Ton-ka. If a Crow meets a bear, when out hunting, he will go around him, and if the bear attacks him he will run away.”¹

When taboo is put on the production of or effort to obtain some desirable goods, it is usually also put on their consumption. In consequence of this fact further citations of productive taboos will be postponed until beliefs about consumption are presented, at which time the gentes of the Omaha tribe will be referred to, as the facts are representative and are brought forward by an unquestioned authority.

SOME BELIEFS AFFECTING DISTRIBUTION

It was seldom that an individual or a family of an Amerind tribe accumulated more property than its neighbors. There were exceptions, but the social philosophy of the Amerind was a great leveler. A chief's lodge might be the largest one in the village, but it was not always so. His horses might be the most numerous, or the swiftest, but such was by no means invariably the case. If the individual possessed great wealth, it was in some form which could be personally conveyed and which seldom lasted beyond his death. There was no opportunity for one person or family to become permanently richer than the neighbors, because if anyone in a social group was in need, food, clothing, shelter, dogs, horses, anything, everything was at the disposal of the needy party. When want raised the door-flap of a wigwam, it was speedily sent away and not allowed to enter until it walked into every wigwam of the group.

It was written of a Florida tribe, near the close of the eighteenth century, that a granary was built in the maize-field, into which, at harvest-time, “each family carries and deposits a certain quantity, according to his ability or inclination, or none at all if he so chooses.” Its purpose was “that of a public treasury, supplied by a few voluntary contributions, and to which every

¹ Geo. P. Belden, *Belden the White Chief*, 1872, p. 137.

citizen has the right of free and equal access, when his own private stores are consumed, to serve as a supply to fly to for succor, to assist neighboring towns whose crops may have failed, accommodate strangers or travelers, afford provisions or supplies when they go forth on hostile expeditions, and for all other exigencies of the state."¹

A skilful hunter was usually rewarded, not by greater personal supplies of economic goods, but by the esteem of his fellows. Definitely known social laws divided the products of the chase, and it was often true that the unskilled hunter obtained as large a share as the most skilful. Among the Omaha tribe a deer, when killed, was generally divided into four parts; when there were five men in the hunting party a fifth division was made.² They divided an elk in five sections, and when the elk was large it was often divided in six parts. When a hunter shot a wild turkey, a goose, or a raccoon, any person standing near might have it without question, if he could get hold of it first. The hunter "thinks that he can get the next one which he kills."³

Among the Menomini tribe this law of division of the spoils of the chase operates today, although the moccasin (about the last visible remnant of the primitive dress of the Amerind) is seldom seen on the reservation. In the autumn of 1898 a young half-blood, home from college, shot a deer but succeeded only in breaking its hind-legs. The young man ran home for more ammunition, leaving his deer, and unconscious of the tribal law of his fathers. When he returned he found that another hunter had not only cut the throat of the deer but had divided the meat among his fellows. The young man who shot the animal and left it helpless sitting in the snow received no share, but became the laughing-stock of the tribe.

¹ Bartram, *Travels through Florida*, London, 1791, p. 512.

² J. Owen Dorsey, Omaha Sociology, in *Rept. Bur. Ethnology*, 1881-82, p. 300.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

One who attempts to become rich by accumulation is socially ostracized by the tribe. An Ojibwa half-blood on the Lac Courte Oreille reservation, Wisconsin, has twice been well off (as compared with the others of the tribe), having sold his pine timber to greater advantage than they, but in spite of advice from white friends, and well-meant promises, he has each time given away his property by holding feasts and dances, for which functions he furnished presents and provisions for hundreds of neighbors during weeks at a time. He is now no richer than those about him, but he is influential in the tribal councils, and all speak a good word for him.

In the middle of the nineteenth century it was written of the Cowitchin tribe on the Pacific coast that Saw-se-a, a chief, gradually accumulated, by exacting tribute from his tribe, a large amount of goods which he was in the habit of distributing to his guests at a feast. A chief was accustomed to give such a feast every three or four years. Paul Kane, our authority, heard of a chief who gave away at one time "twelve bales of blankets, twenty to thirty guns, numerous pots, kettles, pans, knives and other cutlery, great quantities of beads, numerous beautiful Chinese boxes, etc." Such generosity adds to the importance of the chief among his tribesmen.¹

SOME BELIEFS AFFECTING CONSUMPTION

Beliefs affecting consumption are numerous and varied. One of the chief reasons for taboo against eating foods arises from religious belief regarding the clan totem. Of the Elk gens of the Omaha tribe it is said: "The members of this gens are afraid to touch any part of the male elk, or to eat its flesh; and they cannot eat the flesh of the male deer. Should they accidentally violate this custom they say that they are sure to break out in boils and white spots on different parts of the body."² The *Wasigije* gens

¹ Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist*, 1859, p. 221.

² Dorsey, op. cit., p. 225.

(a subgens of the *Inke-sabé*, Black-shoulder, gens) of the Omaha tribe may not eat the tongues of the bison, and they are not allowed to touch a bison's head, for the members of that gens were originally bison, and dwelt beneath the surface of the water before they came on the earth. Another subgens of the tribe does not eat red maize for fear of breaking out with running sores about the mouth.¹ The Omaha *Haṅga* gens (meaning "ancestral" or "foremost") is also a buffalo or bison gens. This gens has four subgentes, two of which may not eat buffalo sides, geese, swans, or cranes. The other two subgentes may not eat buffalo tongues, but they may eat buffalo sides.² The *Jatada* gens of the same tribe has four subgentes which have the following consumption taboos:

1. *Wasabe-hit'aji* (meaning "Those who do not touch the skin of the black bear") are not allowed either to eat the flesh or to touch the skin of a black bear.³
2. *Wajīṅga-satajī* (meaning "They do not eat (small) birds") is not allowed to eat prairie-chicken when sick.⁴
3. The Eagle subgens is not allowed to touch a buffalo head.⁵
4. The Turtle subgens is forbidden to touch or to carry turtles, but its people may eat turtles.⁶

Members of the Buffalo-tail gens of the same tribe may not eat a calf (bison or domestic) while it is red, but they may eat it when it becomes black. Like members of the *Wasigije* gens they are not allowed to touch a bison's head.⁷ The Omaha tribe also has a Deer-head gens the members of which may not touch the skin of any animal of the deer family; they are not allowed to use deerskin moccasins; they may not use deer-fat for hairoil as all the other Omaha may; however, they are not forbidden to eat deer meat.⁸ Members of the Omaha *Ingejide* gens do not eat buffalo calves.⁹

¹ Dorsey, op. cit., p. 231.

⁴ Ibid., p. 238.

⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

² Ibid., p. 235.

⁵ Ibid., p. 239.

⁸ Ibid., p. 245.

³ Ibid., p. 237.

⁶ Ibid., p. 240.

⁹ Ibid., p. 248.

None of the Omaha gentes eat dried fish, dried fish-spawn, slugs, dried crickets, grasshoppers, or other insects; nor do they use as a drink any fish or animal oil.¹

Schoolcraft² wrote of a California tribe in the vicinity of San Diego that they do not eat the flesh of large animals; and this taboo is based on the belief that the souls of certain human generations long ago entered such animals. The Mission people of this tribe removed the taboo on beef because they subsisted largely on that meat. Schoolcraft says that a half-blood once cooked bear meat and gave it to the Mission people to eat for beef, and that as soon as they learned of the deception they were taken with sudden retching which ceased only when the cause was removed. He further relates that the reproachful epithet, "They eat venison," used by the tamer tribes for the wilder ones, is based on such taboo. The same author says that the Navaho never eat the flesh of the gray-squirrel.³ It is claimed that the Apache of Arizona refused to eat bear meat even when so cooked by the whites as to be indistinguishable from beef.⁴

One of the great forces standing in the pathway of the Amerind and blocking his steps from natural manhood to economic manhood is a religious force causing consumption of property at the owner's death. At such time property is abandoned, or killed, or burned, or broken, or otherwise injured, or deposited with the corpse. The fundamental idea behind all such action is the belief that all material things have spirits or shades, and some act is performed which is supposed to enable the shades of the property to accompany the shade of the owner to the existence beyond this life.

Le Jeune quotes a member of a tribe near Quebec in 1633-34 as saying that the souls of the Amerind "hunt for the souls of Beavers, Porcupine, Moose, and other animals, using the soul of

¹ Dorsey, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

² *Indian Tribes*, vol. v, pp. 215-216.

³ Ibid., vol. IV, p. 214; see also vol. III, p. 113.

⁴ Bartlett, *Personal Narrative*, 1854, vol. I, p. 321.

the snowshoes to walk upon the soul of the snow, which is in yonder country [where the sun sets]; in short they make use of the souls of all things, as we here use the things themselves."¹

Fire is supposed so to dematerialize the object burned as to allow its spirit to proceed untrammeled to the spirit-land. Breaking or drilling the implements and utensils was practiced for the same reason—to free the spirit from the object.

The Amerindian idea of a life beyond death is, in the main, that there is a continuation of the present conditions so far as wants and means of satisfaction are concerned. The individual will then need what he has needed or found useful here; and it was therefore a universal custom to supply food at the burial-place, often for many months after death. Although the idea of individual property-right manifests itself in the consumption of goods at the funeral, the idea of property as property is subservient, it is believed, to the idea that the individual will need the spirit of such property to meet the wants of his spirit.

Of a well-known tribe we read: "No Navajo will ever occupy a lodge in which a person has died. The lodge is burned, and the favorite animals of the deceased are usually killed, to accompany him on his intended journey."² Grinnell says of the Blackfoot tribe that when a chief or noted warrior dies, his lodge is removed a short distance from the village, and the corpse with its personal effects is left inside. "Outside the lodge, a number of his horses, often twenty or more, were killed, so that he might have plenty to ride on his journey to the Sand Hills [the place of future existence], and to use after arriving there. . . . In ancient times, it is said, dogs were killed at the grave."³ "The Muscogules [of Florida, in 1791] bury their deceased in the earth, . . . depositing with him his gun, tomahawk, pipe, and such other matter as he had the greatest value for in his life time."

¹ Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, vol. vi, p. 179.

² Schoolcraft, op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 213-214.

³ Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 1882, pp. 193-194.

The remainder of his effects were divided among his wives and children.¹ It is said of the Round Valley tribe of California that "everything owned by the deceased," and often much donated material, are thrown into the grave.² Of the Tolkotins of Oregon we read that "whatever property the deceased possessed is placed about the corpse," and if he was a person of consequence his friends purchased other articles, such as apparel, and laid them also with him.³

In prehistoric burial-places it is common to find pipes, tools, and war implements of stone and metal buried with the warriors; utensils and ornaments of stone, shell, and metal buried with the remains of the women, and toys buried with the children. Such exhumations reveal only the few objects of relatively indestructible materials which were consumed at the funerals. But some idea of the extensive consumption of property at the death of a person may be had from a list of materials obtained from the scaffold burial of a year-old Cheyenne child in recent time. The casket contained the following articles: seven buffalo robes, five blankets, three robes of buffalo calfskin with hoods elaborately ornamented with beads, five yards of blue cassimere, six yards of red calico, six yards of brown calico, one infantry overcoat, one beaver cap ornamented with copper disks, gaudy colored sashes, a large striped sack matting, bundles of straps and buckles, long wampum necklaces, strings of pieces of *Haliotis* from the Gulf of California (so highly valued by the tribes both east and west of the Rocky mountains), a red flannel cloak, a red tunic, frock-leggings with bead ornaments, yarn stockings, beaded deerskin moccasins, numerous trinkets, a porcelain image, a china vase, strings of beads, several toys, a pair of mittens, fur collar, skin pouch, etc.⁴

It seems probable that the burial just referred to was an ex-

¹ Bartram, op. cit., p. 515.

² Yarrow, *Mortuary Customs*, 1880, p. 15.

³ Ross Cox, *Adventures on Columbia River*, 1831, vol. II, p. 387.

⁴ Yarrow, op. cit., pp. 69, 70.

travagant one, yet it illustrates that the destruction of property is much greater than a burial-place often reveals, because of the perishable nature of much of the material, and it proves also that the economic idea does not hold sway in the minds of the Amerind. The above-mentioned consumption of goods was made on exactly the same superstitious grounds as though the family of the child had been able to donate only one-tenth the amount. The destruction of property seems appalling when it is recalled that the child (the fictional owner) had not produced a penny's worth of the goods which in this case must have cost more than a hundred dollars—a sum equal to real wealth for a Cheyenne family at that time.

A member of the Algonkin tribe near Quebec in 1632-33 said: "We do not speak any more of the dead among us; indeed, the relatives of the dead never use anything that was used by the dead man during his lifetime."¹ Of the Blackfeet we are told by Grinnell: "If a man dies in a lodge, it is never used again. The people would be afraid of the man's ghost. The lodge is often used to wrap the body in, or perhaps the man may be buried in it."² An almost endless list of similar testimonials of the wholesale destruction of property at funerals might be cited.

Property was sacrificed for several other reasons than that its shade or spirit might accompany that of its late owner. In fact, the Amerind was almost daily at sacrifice to some of the shades which he thought dominated nature. Grinnell also writes concerning a rather peculiar and apparently elaborate sacrifice by the Pawnee. Among that tribe is a belief that certain animals, called *Nahürac*, possess miraculous powers given them by Ti-ra'-wa, the impersonal, intangible deity of the tribe. These animals have five different council-chambers. One of these is a hole which contains water; and Grinnell says of it: "At certain times the people gather there and throw into this hole their offerings to Ti-ra'-wa,

¹ Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, vol. v, p. 135.

² Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 1892, p. 193.

blankets and robes, blue beads, tobacco, eagle-feathers, and moccasins." ¹

The foregoing facts, selected from a great body of similar evidence, reveal that faith or belief,—sometimes social, sometimes incipiently political, but at most times superstitious—is the great stumbling-block which everywhere lay in the pathway of the primitive American leading toward economic manhood; and they also show that, no matter what may be the final or present-day measure of value, there was a time when superstitious faiths or beliefs raised and lowered values at the beck and nod of mere whim and fancy.

¹ Grinnell, *Pawnee Hero Stories*, 1893, p. 359.

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